

# ब्रह्मविद्या

THE ADYAR LIBRARY  
BULLETIN



Volume 83

2019

**THE ADYAR LIBRARY BULLETIN**

**VOLUME 83**



**THE ADYAR LIBRARY AND RESEARCH CENTRE**  
**THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY**  
**ADYAR, CHENNAI 600 020, INDIA**

THE ADYAR LIBRARY BULLETIN

VOLUME 83

**ISSN 0972-2106**  
**RNI 417783**



THE ADYAR LIBRARY AND RESEARCH CENTRE

**Edited by Tim Boyd, and Radha Raghunathan**  
**Published by Mr. S. Harihara Raghavan**  
**Printed by Mr. V. Gopalan at the Vasanta Press,**  
**The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai 600 020, India**

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# The concept of *Pañcamahāyajña* : Origin and transformation<sup>1</sup>

N. K. Sundareswaran

## Introduction

The *Pañcamahāyajña*-s are the five obligatory rites to be performed daily by a householder according to ancient Indian tradition. Their efficacy is extolled by many works on *Dharmaśāstra* and the *Smṛti*-s<sup>2</sup>. Their obligatory nature is also emphasized by pointing out the undesirable consequences of eschewing them<sup>3</sup>. We get references and injunctions to their performance in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts. The tradition is continued even today by orthodox Brahmins.

The five *yajña*-s or sacrifices are

1. *Devayajña*
2. *Pitryajña*
3. *Bhūtajajña*

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented in the 17<sup>th</sup> World Sanskrit Conference held in the University of British Columbia, July 9 to 13, 2018(Vedic section).

<sup>2</sup> See for instance

- i) तासां क्रमेण सर्वासां निष्कृत्यर्थं महर्षिभिः। पञ्च क्लृप्ता महायज्ञाः प्रत्यहं गृहमेधिनाम्॥ - *Manusmṛti* 6.69;
- ii) देवभूतपितृब्रह्ममनुष्याणामनुक्रमात्। महासत्राणि जानीयात् एव हि महामखाः॥ अध्यापनं ब्रह्मयज्ञः पितृयज्ञस्तु तर्पणम्। होमो दैवो बलिर्भौतो नृयज्ञोऽतिथिपूजनम्॥ (*Karmapradīpa* quoted in *Mṛdula* commentary on *Gobhilaḥgrhyasūtra*).

Gautama the author of *Dharmasūtra* includes these in his list of 48 *saṃskāra*-s (गर्भाधानपुंसवनसीमन्तोन्नयन जातकर्म नामकरण अन्नप्राशन चौळोपनयनम्। चत्वारि वेदव्रतानि। स्नानं सहधर्मचारिणीसंयोगः। पञ्चानां यज्ञानामनुष्ठानं देवपितृमनुष्यभूतब्रह्मणाम्। अष्टका पार्वणः श्राद्धं श्रावण्याग्रहायणी चैत्र्याश्वयुजीति सप्त पाकयज्ञसंस्थाः। अग्न्याधेयमग्निहोत्रं दर्शपूर्णमासावाग्रयणं चातुर्मास्यानि निरूढपशुबन्धः सौत्रामणीति सप्त हविर्यज्ञसंस्थाः। अग्निष्टोमोऽत्यग्निष्टाम उक्थ्यः षोडशी वाजपेयोऽतिरात्रोऽप्तोर्याम इति सप्त सोमसंस्थाः। इत्येते चत्वारिंशत् संस्काराः। अथाष्टावात्मगुणाः। दया सर्वभूतेषु क्षान्तिरनसूया शौचमनायासो मङ्गलमकार्पण्यमस्पृहेति।

*Gautamadharmasūtra* – 1.8. 14-24).

<sup>3</sup> See for instance एतेभ्यो यस्य पञ्चभ्यो यज्ञ एकोपि हीयते। मनस्वत्याहुतिस्तस्य प्रायश्चित्तं विधीयते। - *Bhāradvājagṛhyasūtra* 3.25;

देवतातिथिभृत्यानां पितृणामात्मनश्च यः। न निर्वपति पञ्चानामुच्छ्वसन्न स जीवति। - *Manusmṛti* 6.68.

#### 4. *Manuṣyayajña*, and the

#### 5. *Brahmayajña*.

*Devayajña* is propitiating gods by offering oblations into fire. *Pitryajña* is propitiating the *pitṛ*-s by offering *tarpaṇa* (oblations mostly in the form of water, and desirably in the form of *pinḍa*-s). *Bhūtajajña* is propitiating the animals and other living beings, including good and evil spirits by way of food-offerings. *Manuṣyayajña* is feeding human beings, especially Brahmins. *Brahmayajña* is the ritualistic recitation of Veda-s.

A close study of the origin of this concept of pentad of sacrifices and the variations and transformations that have come into existence in their performance will certainly be rewarding for a serious student of the ritualistic tradition of India. Here in this paper, an attempt is made to focus on some of the interesting and intricate aspects in these lines which need further deliberation.

### *R̥natraya* and the *Vaiśvadeva*

The origin of the concept seems to be closely associated with two other concepts viz. the triad of debts (*r̥natraya*) and the *Vaiśvadeva* rite. The concept that a Brahmin is born with three debts which he owes to the *ṛṣi*-s, to the gods and to the *pitṛ*-s which might have originated during the formation of later Vedic texts and the *Brāhmaṇa*-s, reappears in the epics, *purāṇa*-s and even in the classical Sanskrit literature. The *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* has this passage जायमानो वै ब्राह्मणस्त्रिभिर्ऋणवा जायते। ब्रह्मचर्येण षिभ्यो यज्ञेन देवेभ्यः प्रजया पितृभ्यः। (6.3.10.5) (a Brahmin, at birth itself, has three debts – those of *brahmacarya* to the *ṛṣi*-s, *yajña* to the gods and progeny to the *pitṛ*-s). By performing *brahmacarya*, he repays his debt to the *ṛṣi*-s ; by performing sacrifices (ritualistic offerings into the fire) the debt to the gods; and by begetting progeny the debt to the *pitṛ*-s. That is, one has to appease these three groups. For appeasing gods, it has always been held in the Vedic lore, the performance of *yajña* is the best means<sup>4</sup>. For appeasing the lineage of sages and seers who have been the torchbearers of the intellectual and cultural legacy (i.e. the *ṛṣi*-s), the best means would be imbibing, improving and furthering the values, principles and ideals cherished by them. For appeasing *pitṛ*-s two means are usually suggested by tradition. One is feeding learned Brahmins and the other is offering *pinḍa* and / or water-oblations. Thus the ceremony of *śrāddha* has three

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<sup>4</sup> *Yajña* is often defined as sacrificing things in favour of gods – देवतोद्देश्येन द्रव्यत्यागः.

elements viz. feeding learned Brahmins, *piṇḍapradāna*<sup>5</sup> and *tarpaṇa*<sup>6</sup>. The *piṇḍapradāna* rite in the *śrāddha* is adopted from the *piṇḍapitryajña* of the *śrauta* tradition. Now in order to continue this tradition of offering *piṇḍa* and *tarpaṇa* to the deceased forefathers uninterruptedly, one has to beget progeny. That is why begetting progeny is said to appease *pitṛ*-s.

The *Vaiśvadeva* is an obligatory rite to be performed by a householder. It has three components. One is offering rice-oblations into fire for the benefit of prescribed gods. The second is food-offerings made on the floor (not into fire, to be more specific) to different spirits and living beings. The third is offerings to the *pitṛ*-s. This rite has been prescribed by texts belonging to the *Kalpasūtra* class of literature<sup>7</sup> and *Smṛti*-s. Many a text on this rite, prescribe feeding the guest (*atithibhojana*) at the end. This feeding of guest is *manuṣyayajña* (Some texts enjoin that it is feeding guest in general whereas others specify that it is a Brahmin who is to be fed<sup>8</sup>). Thus we can see that the *Vaiśvadeva* comprises the essential features of the four (of the pentad) of great sacrifices (*pañcamahāyajña*-s) viz. the *devayajña*, *bhūtayajña*, *pitryajña* and *manuṣyayajña*. All these four have a common feature. The food utilized in these rites, is prepared in the domestic fire of the sacrificer or the householder. And some texts prescribe the fifth great sacrifice, i.e. the *brahmayajña* too to be performed sitting near the domestic fire, thus associating it with the fire (*grhyāgni*)<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Offering of *piṇḍa*-s (rice balls) for three generations of deceased ancestors viz. one's father, his father, and his grandfather. For females also it is offered – the wives of the first said. Actually this rite has its roots in the *śrauta* tradition of *piṇḍapitryajña*. Also see the passages like देवान् भावयतानेन ते देवा भावयन्तु वः । परस्परं भावयन्तः श्रेयः परमवाप्स्यथ ॥ (*Bhagavadgītā* 3.11)

<sup>6</sup> दद्यादहरहः श्राद्धमन्नाद्येनोदकेन च । (*Manusmṛti* 3.82); यदेव तर्पयत्यद्भिः पितृन् ध्यात्वा द्विजोत्तमः । तेनैव कृत्स्नमाप्नोति पितृयज्ञक्रियाफलम् ॥ (*Manusmṛti* 3.283)

<sup>7</sup> See for instance *Manusmṛti* 3.84, *Āpastambadharmasūtra* 2.2.1, *Baudhāyanagr̥hyasūtra* 2.9.1, *Bhāradvājagr̥hyasūtra* 3.12-14, *Mānavagr̥hyasūtra* 2.12.1, *Āpastambagr̥hyasūtra* 3.7.27

<sup>8</sup> *Baudhāyanagr̥hyasūtra* for instance has that it is Brahmins to be fed in the *manuṣyayajña* - यद् ब्राह्मणेभ्योन्नं ददाति स मनुष्ययज्ञ इति ।

<sup>9</sup> *Bhāradvāja* and *Baudhāyana* prescribe that one should do *brahmayajña* sitting near, on the western side, of fireplace (fire) . *Bhāradvāja* in his *Gr̥hyasūtra* states : अपरेण गार्हपत्यमुपविश्याधीहि भो इत्युक्त्वा सावित्री .....यदधीते स ब्रह्मयज्ञः (३.१५). *Baudhāyana* also in a similar vein states : जघनेन गार्हपत्यमुपविश्यापासनस्य वा अधीहि भो इति गार्हपत्यमुक्त्वा प्राणायामैस्त्रिभिरायम्य सावित्री सहस्रकृत्व आवर्त्तयेच्छतकृत्वोऽपरिमितकृत्वो वा दशावरम् । वेदादयश्छन्दांसि कूश्माण्डानि चाधीयीत - अग्निमीळे पुरोहितमित्यृग्वेदस्येषे



## The *Vaiśvadeva* and the *pañcamahāyajña*

The later texts like the commentaries and the *Nibandha* works discuss whether the rites of *Vaiśvadeva* and *pañcamahāyajña* are one and the same or not. In the *Manusmṛti* the *Vaiśvadeva* rite is described in the midst of the instructions on *pañcamahāyajña*. Manu ordains that one should perform all the domestic rites and the *pañcamahāyajña* with the *vaivāhikāgni* (ritualistic fire established in the marriage rite). His statement runs as

वैवाहिकेऽग्नौ कुर्वीत गृह्यं कर्म यथाविधि।  
पञ्चयज्ञविधानं च पक्तिं चान्वाहिकीं गृही॥ (६.६७).

We can see that he puts *pañcamahāyajña*, and the rites with food cooked in the domestic fire, together to form one group. After stating in brief the nature of the components of *pañcamahāyajña* and extolling their efficacy, immediately he goes on to prescribe *homa*-s to be offered in the *devayajña* of the *vaiśvadeva*, proceeding further with the *baliharāṇa* and *atithipūjana*<sup>10</sup>. Thus he treats the five great sacrifices as part of the *vaiśvadeva* rite. Kullūkabhaṭṭa takes it the other way round. For him *vaiśvadeva* is a part of the five great sacrifices. Commenting on the above verse of Manu, he says: ‘One should perform, in that fire, the domestic rites viz. morning and evening offerings, *aṣṭakāhoma* etc., the *vaiśvadeva* rites which are ordained to be done as part of the *pañcamahāyajña*-s, and the *pākayajña*-s’<sup>11</sup>.

The authors of *Gṛhyasūtra*-s and *Dharmasūtra*-s treat these two rites in different contexts. Commentators seem to be confused as to whether these two are identical or not. Nārāyaṇa, a commentator on the *Āśvalāyanagrhyasūtra* says categorically that the *pañcamahāyajña*-s are nothing but the *vaiśvadeva*. He even cites Manu. He states that Manu has explained the four of the five sacrifices (omitting the *pitṛyajña*) as part of the *vaiśvadeva*<sup>12</sup>. Sudarśanācārya, on the contrary, states in his commentary on

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त्वोर्जे त्वेति यजुर्वेदस्याग्न आयाहि वीतय इति सामवेदस्य शन्नो देवीरभिष्टय इत्यथर्ववेदस्याग्निर्मूर्धेति छन्दांसि यद्देवा देवहेळनमिति कूश्माण्ड्यः। यदधीते स ब्रह्मयज्ञः।

It may be noted that *brahmayajña*, is usually prescribed to be performed outside the residential area. See the section *Brahmayajña*, the latest addition to the group.

<sup>10</sup> See *Manusmṛti* 6. 84 - 94.

<sup>11</sup> तस्मिन्नग्नौ गृह्योक्तं कर्म सायम्प्रातर्होमाष्टकादि यथाशास्त्रमग्निसम्पाद्यं च पञ्चमहायज्ञान्तर्गतवैश्वदेवाद्यनुष्ठानं च पाकयज्ञं गृहस्थः कुर्यात्। (*Manusmṛti* p.90, Nirnayasaagar Ed. 1901)

<sup>12</sup> तस्माद्वैश्वदेवादय एव पञ्चयज्ञा इति सिद्धम्। मनुनाप्येवमेवोक्तं पितृयज्ञवर्जम्। (Commentary on *Āśvalāyanagrhyasūtra* 1.1.3. This *sūtra* appears in the section on *pañcamahāyajña*.)

*Āpastambagr̥hyasūtra* (7.3.27) that the *vaiśvadeva* and *pañcamahāyajña* are distinctly two rites. Quoting the relevant passage from Haradatta's (famous commentator of *Gr̥hyasūtra*-s and *Dharmasūtra*-s) commentary (on *Āpastambagr̥hyasūtra* 7.3.27) stating that *vaiśvadeva* and *pañcamahāyajña* are identical, he categorically refutes it<sup>13</sup>.

It seems that the custom of practising some components of these two rites, like those of propitiating the gods by *homa* (*devayajña*) and appeasing animals, plants, and other spirits (*bhūtayajña*), were prevalent even before the concept of *vaiśvadeva* and *pañcamahāyajña* originated. The confusion regarding how to reconcile these two concepts (*vaiśvadeva* and *pañcamahāyajña*) persisted for a long time which is reflected in the exegetic literature.

Haradatta in his commentary on *Āpastambadharmasūtra* 1.4.13.1, records some of such disputes and confusion prevailing among the practitioners. He points out to the view held by some that the *āhuti*-s prescribed as part of *devayajña* as a separate rite from that of *vaiśvadeva*.<sup>14</sup> He explicitly expresses his opinion against this stand. He takes the *pañcamahāyajña*-s as a part of *vaiśvadeva*. Further he states that there is dispute regarding whether the *vaiśvadeva* is a *saṃskāra* meant for the person, or for the food. Some people maintain that if somebody avoids meals, he need not perform *vaiśvadeva*, as it is a *saṃskāra* meant for the food, he says<sup>15</sup>. Aṣṭāvakra also, in his commentary on *Mānavagr̥hyasūtra*, records this position held by some<sup>16</sup>.

He records of the discrepancy between the prescription in the text and the actual practice. He says that the performing order of the *pañcamahāyajña*-s, as is given by *Āpastamba*, differs from that of actual practice (न चायमुपदेशक्रमोऽनुष्ठान उपयुज्यते। अनुष्ठानं तु

<sup>13</sup> केचित् - वैश्वदेवे विश्वदेवा देवता विधीयन्ते निर्वापकाले सङ्कल्पार्थम्, ईशानयज्ञवत्। ... इदं च वैश्वदेवं पञ्चमहायज्ञेभ्यः पृथग्भूतम्। ... तत्र ..... पञ्चमहायज्ञेभ्यो न पृथग्वैश्वदेवमित्यपि न; प्रकरणान्तरात्संज्ञाभेदाच्च कर्मभेदावगतेः। (*Āpastambagr̥hyasūtra*, Oriental research Institute, Mysore, 1987)

<sup>14</sup> वैश्वदेवोक्तप्रकारेणैवैष देवयज्ञः। केचिद् वैश्वदेवाहुतीभ्यः पृथग्भूतामिमामाहुतिं मन्यन्ते। देवेभ्यः स्वाहेति च मन्त्रमिच्छन्ति। देवयज्ञेन यक्ष्य इति सङ्कल्पमिच्छन्ति। वयं तु न तथेति गृह्य एवावोचाम।

<sup>15</sup> केचिदाहुः - आकाष्ठादिति वचनादशनीयाभावेन भोजनलोपेऽपि यथाकथञ्चिद् वैश्वदेवं कर्तव्यम्। पुरुषसंस्कारत्वादिति। अपरे तु - अशनीयसंस्कार इति वदन्तो भोजनलोपे वैश्वदेवं न कर्तव्यमिति स्थिताः।

<sup>16</sup> नक्तं सायमुपक्रमवशाद् वैश्वदेवहोममन्त्रसंस्कारं केचिदिच्छन्ति। .... तस्मात् पुरुषसंस्कारार्थतैवेति सिद्धम्। *Mānavagr̥hyasūtra* Ed. B. C. Lele, PANINI, New Delhi, pp. 172,173

ब्रह्मयज्ञो देवयज्ञः पितृयज्ञो भूतयज्ञो मनुष्ययज्ञ इति।). This difference of opinion regarding the order of the *pañcamahāyajña*-s can be seen right from the *Brāhmaṇa* texts<sup>17</sup>.

Another similar development can be seen in the attempt of connecting the *pañcamahāyajña*-s with *pākayajña*-s. *Āśvalāyanagr̥hyasūtra* begins with the statement that there are three *pākayajña*-s (1.1.2). In the next sentence an attempt is made to include all kinds of rites discussed in the *Gr̥hyasūtra*-s in these three. *Huta*, *prahuta* and *brahmaṇi huta* are the three. *Huta* comprises all the rites wherein offerings are made into fire. *Prahuta* on the other hand comprises all rites wherein offerings are not made into fire. *Brahmaṇi huta* are those in which Brahmins are fed<sup>18</sup>. Baudhāyana, in a similar manner, classifies all the domestic rites into seven heads in his *gr̥hyasūtra*. The seven heads are *huta*, *prahuta*, *āhuta*, *śūlagava*, *baliharāṇa*, *pratyavarohāṇa* and *aṣṭakāhoma*. Thus we can see a phase of confusion which led to the tendency to readjust and formulate new schemes of domestic rites to include new entrants, among the authors of *Gr̥hyasūtra*-s and *Dharmasūtra*-s / *Smṛti*-s. The after-effects of this trend can be seen in the *Manusmṛti* also. There, immediately after introducing the *pañcamahāyajña*-s, alternative names for all the five components are given. These names too are based on the nature of main offerings made in the rites.

अहुतं च हुतं चैव तथा प्रहुतमेव च ।  
 ब्राह्म्यं हुतं प्राशितं च पञ्चयज्ञान् प्रचक्षते ॥  
 जपोऽहुतो हुतो होमो प्रहुतो भौतिको बलिः  
 ब्राह्म्यं हुतं द्विजाग्र्यार्चा प्राशितं पितृतर्पणम् ॥  
 (६.७३,७४)

*Ahuta*, *huta*, *prahuta*, *brāhmya huta* and *prāśita* are the new names given. *Ahuta* is the *brahmayajña*. *Huta* is offering into fire. *Prahuta* is *baliharāṇa* (offerings not into fire). *Brāhmya huta* comprises feeding of Brahmins. *Prāśita* is *pitr̥tarpaṇa*.

Here it can be seen that while equating the components of *vaiśvadeva* with the members of *huta* series, some interesting discrepancies have occurred.

The *brahmayajña* which does not consist of any offering into fire - does not even require fire for its performance - is also included in the *huta* series. The *huta* series

<sup>17</sup> For instance, cf. पञ्च वा एते महायज्ञाः सतति प्रतायन्ते सतति सन्तिष्ठन्ते देवयज्ञः पितृयज्ञो भूतयज्ञो मनुष्ययज्ञो ब्रह्मयज्ञः (*Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*); पञ्चैव महायज्ञाः। तान्येव महासत्राणि। भूतयज्ञो मनुष्ययज्ञः पितृयज्ञो देवयज्ञो ब्रह्मयज्ञ इति। (*Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*); अथातः पञ्चयज्ञाः। देवयज्ञो भूतयज्ञः पितृयज्ञो ब्रह्मयज्ञो मनुष्ययज्ञ इति। (*Āśvalāyanagr̥hyasūtra*)

<sup>18</sup> त्रयः पाकयज्ञाः। हुता अग्नौ हूयमाना अनग्नौ प्रहुता ब्राह्मणभोजने ब्रह्मणि हुताः। (*Āśvalāyanagr̥hyasūtra* 1.1.2-3)

primarily consisted of three rites to be performed in /with the domestic fire, as is indicated by the *Āśvalāyanagr̥hyasūtra*.

The *pitṛyajña* originally (or in the earlier phases) comprised two components – feeding Brahmins and the *pinḍa* / water offering. The part of feeding Brahmins was given the status of an independent *yajña* as *manuṣyayajña*. In doing so, the age-old custom of honouring/feeding guests (*atithipūjana*)<sup>19</sup> was transformed or confined to feeding Brahmins. This adjustment or transformation of *atithipūjana* into *manuṣyayajña* caused some confusion among the authors of *Gr̥hyasūtra*-s as to whether the honouring of guests is confined to Brahmins or not.

The *pitṛyajña*, which originally had two main components, was reduced to *tarpaṇa*. But the feeding of Brahmins, which had, by then, become an inevitable part, is seen reappearing or lingering. That is why, in Manu's new scheme, *pitṛyajña* is named as *prāśita*. At the same time, *tarpaṇa* is shown as its essential component. Gautama in his *Dharmasūtra* states : पितृभ्यश्चोदकदानं यथोत्साहमन्यत् (१.५.५). Haradatta explains this *sūtra* to mean that 'offering of water' is obligatory in the *pitṛyajña* and the feeding is desirable<sup>20</sup>. It is interesting to note that he hastens to add that *tarpaṇa* is to be offered to gods and ṛṣi-s as well<sup>21</sup>. Uśanas, a later author (of *Smṛti*) substantiates this view by a verse:

आपो देवगणाः सर्व आपः पितृगणाः स्मृताः।

तस्मादप्सु जलं देयं पितृणां दत्तमक्षयम्॥<sup>22</sup>

It may be noted here that *tarpaṇa* had been believed to please ṛṣi-s also. And it was included in the *brahmayajña*. In the *Āśvalāyanagr̥hyasūtra*, it has been prescribed as part of *brahmayajña*<sup>23</sup>. In the *vedavṛata*-s - the rites prescribed in the ritualistic

<sup>19</sup> There are many passages in the vedic literature showing the antiquity of *atithipūjana*. To cite a few:

- i. मोघमन्नं विन्दते अप्रचेताः सत्यं ब्रवीमि वध इत्स तस्य। नार्यमणं पुष्यति नो सखायं केवलाघो भवति केवलादी। (*R̥gveda* 10.117.6)
- ii. यथातिथय आगताय सर्पिष्वदातिथ्यं क्रियते तादृगेव तत् (*Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 5.2.2.4)
- iii. यावद्भिर्वै राजानुचरैरागच्छति सर्वेभ्यो वै तेभ्य आतिथ्यं क्रियते। (*Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 6.2.1.2)
- iv. वैश्वानरः प्रविशति अतिथिर्ब्राह्मणो गृहान्। (*Kāthopaniṣat* 1.7)
- v. न कञ्चन वसतौ प्रत्याचक्षीत। तद्ब्रतम्। (*Taittirīya Upaniṣat* 3.10.1)

<sup>20</sup> पितृभ्यो नित्यमुदकं दद्यात्। अन्यद् भोजनफलमूलादि यथाशक्ति दद्यात्। (*Gautamadharmaśūtra* 1.5.5)

<sup>21</sup> अत्र चकारान्नित्यं देवर्षीणामपि तर्पणं कर्तव्यमिति दर्शितम्। (*Gautamadharmaśūtra* 1.5.5)

<sup>22</sup> Quoted by Haradatta in his commentary on *Gautamadharmaśūtra* 1.5.5

<sup>23</sup> देवतास्तर्पयति प्रजापतिर्ब्रह्मा वेदा देवा ऋषयः सर्वाणि छन्दांस्योकारो वषट्कारो .....रक्षांसि भूतान्येवमन्तानि।

beginning and ending of the Vedic studies - also *tarpaṇa* is prescribed by all the authors of *Gr̥hyasūtra*-s as an inevitable element to propitiate the *ṛṣi*-s. A similar prescription is seen in the rite of *Upākarman* as well. Kṛṣṇayajurvedins call it *kāṇḍarṣitarpaṇa*. Sāmavedins have this propitiation of the *ṛṣi*-s elevated to a higher grade of *pūjā*. It may be noted that the *tarpaṇa* prescribed by the authors of *Sūtra* texts, in the *brahmayajña*, has been further elaborated by tradition. Thus in the *prayoga* and *paddhati* texts, and in practice too, we find that *tarpaṇa* is offered to many a *ṛṣi*, especially in the schools of *Sāmaveda* and *R̥gveda*. Followers of *Baudhāyana* school also have an elaborate *ṛṣi tarpaṇa* in their *brahmayajña*.

### ***Brahmayajña*, the latest addition to the group**

Thus from the literature on the *vaiśvadeva* and the *pākayajña*-s available in the texts of *Kalpasūtra*-s it seems that *brahmayajña* was added to the triad of appeasing gods, feeding fellow beings like animals, birds and other living beings (including gods and goblins), and feeding guests. The propitiation of *pitr*-s - a class of gods<sup>24</sup> - had already been added to the triad, as a part of the *baliharāṇa*, i.e. the second component<sup>25</sup>. The members of this triad had the common feature of food offerings. This food was prepared in the ritualistic fire. The name ‘*vaiśvadeva*’ got attached to this rite of triad as the main objective was to appease all kinds of gods and spirits. The act of pleasing all living beings and other spirits, especially the evil ones, seems to have been developed from this triad. The term *baliharāṇa*, seen employed as a synonym for *vaiśvadeva* itself, is an indicator to this.

*Brahmayajña* is the ritualistic chanting of Veda. For carrying out this, no fire, either *gr̥hya* or *śrauta*, was necessary. As is indicated by *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, the earlier practice was to chant the Veda-s sitting outside the ‘*grāma*’. Even today it is practiced without fire. The injunction of performing outside the ‘*grāma*’ is not followed. As we have seen, some authors of *Gr̥hyasūtra*-s like Bharadvāja and Baudhāyana clearly instruct that the ritualistic chanting should be done sitting beside the ritualistic fire (see foot note no. 6). This indicates that *brahmayajña* was brought in later to this fold.

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अथ ऋषयः शतर्चिनो माध्यमो गृत्समदो विश्वामित्रो वामदेवोत्रिभरद्वाजो वसिष्ठः प्रगाथाः पावमान्यः क्षुद्रसूक्ता महासूक्ता इति । प्रचीनावीती । सुमन्तुजैमिनिवैशम्पायनपैलसूत्रभाष्यभारतमहाभारतधर्माचार्या .. ये चान्ये आचार्यास्ते सर्वे तृप्यन्तिविति । ( *Āśvalāyanagr̥hyasūtra* 3.4.1-4)

<sup>24</sup> मनोहैरण्यगर्भस्य ये मरीच्यादयः सुताः । तेषामृषीणां सर्वेषां पुत्राः पितृगणाः स्मृताः ॥ ( *Manusmṛti* 3.194)

<sup>25</sup> अथैतद्बलिशेषमद्भिर्भ्यासिच्यापसलवि दक्षिणा निनयेत्तत्पितृभ्यो भवति । ( *Gobhilaḥgr̥hyasūtra* 1.4.12)



What is the objective of doing *brahmayajña* ? What could have been the goal behind which prompted the earliest practitioners or the theorists to formulate such a practice? From whence this belief that uttering *vedamantra*-s would bring in good results might have begun? From whence the practice of uttering of *vedamantra*-s as an expiatory measure, might have come into existence? These questions are pertinent and need to be answered.

The earlier texts dealing with, or rather ordaining the practice of *brahmayajña* , might be of help in exploring in these lines. The *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* and *Āśvalāyanagr̥hyasūtra* are the earliest sources of *brahmayajña*. Even among these, the second chapter of *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* is the earliest one.

The *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* contains a brief narration of the five great sacrifices, a description of practicing *brahmayajña*, intermixing with explanations and justifications with stories, as is the wont style with the *Brāhmaṇa* texts, extolling its practice by identifying it with great *yāga*-s, extolling its efficacy in pleasing gods<sup>26</sup> and *pitr*-s<sup>27</sup> and in expiating sins<sup>28</sup>. The *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (Mādhyandina recension 11.5.6) and *Āśvalāyanagr̥hyasūtra* also contain all these elements. *Āśvalāyanagr̥hyasūtra* closely follows *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*. The *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* has some slight deviations and additions. It has a separate section (the very next one) extolling the performance of *brahmayajña* the tenor of which clearly indicates its posteriority. The section is called *svādhyāyaprasāmsākhyam brāhmaṇam*. The passage begins as ‘अथातः स्वाध्यायप्रशंसा। प्रिये स्वाध्यायप्रवचने भवतः। युक्तमना भवति। अपराधीनोऽहरहरर्थान् साधयते। सुखं स्वपिति। परमचिकित्सक आत्मनो भवति। इन्द्रियसंयमश्च। एकारामता च। प्रज्ञावृद्धिः। यशोलोकपक्तिः। प्रज्ञा वर्धमाना चतुरो धर्मान्ब्राह्मणमभिनिष्पादयति। ब्रह्मण्यं प्रतिरूपचर्या यशोलोकपक्तिम्। लोकः पच्यमानश्चतुर्भिर्धर्मैर्ब्राह्मणं भुनक्ति - अर्चया च दानेन चाज्येयतया चावध्यतया च।’ This is a list of unfailing benefits alluring the aspirant. The list itself, especially the members like *indriyasamyama* (control of senses), *ekārāmatā* (ability to enjoy the serenity of solitude) and the set of four given at the end, indicate the later nature of the passage. Again, at the end of this section, there is a poetic passage which expresses that a Brahmin should have the *svādhyāya* as inevitable and inherent natural act just as the stars keep on moving, just as water keeps on flowing (यन्ति वा आपः। एत्यादित्यः। यन्ति नक्षत्राणि। यथा ह वा एता देवता नेयुर्न कुर्युः। एवं हैतदहर्ब्राह्मणो भवति। यदहः स्वाध्यायं नाधीते। तस्मात्स्वाध्यायोऽध्येतव्यः। तस्मादपि ऋचं वा यजुर्वा साम वा गाथां वा कुम्भ्यां वाभिव्याहरेत्।

<sup>26</sup> यदृचोऽधीते पयआहुतिभिरेव तद् देवाँस्तर्पयति ...

<sup>27</sup> यदृचोऽधीते पयसः कूल्या अस्य पितृन् स्वधा अभिवहन्ति ...

<sup>28</sup> ताभिः क्षुधं पाप्मानमपाञ्चन्।

व्रतस्याविच्छेदाय।). Thus the whole section indicates to a later date. Moreover it (i.e. *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*) does not speak anything about the technical details regarding performance of *brahmayajña*.

The *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* describes the details of performing *brahmayajña*, which is closely followed by the *Āśvalāyanagr̥hyasūtra*. Other *Gr̥hyasūtra* texts also follow suit with slight variation in some details. The *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, explains or justifies the prescribed actions as is the style of *Brāhmaṇa* texts.

### How to perform *brahmayajña*?

The *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* gives clear instructions for the ritualistic conduct of *brahmayajña* / *svādhyāya*. The time prescribed is early morning, after sunrise. The place is specified as outside the ‘grāma’, where even the thatched roof of the houses (or ‘grāma’) is not visible. It should be eastwards or northwards from the ‘grāma’. The performer should have his *upavīta* on the left shoulder. He is to sit cross-legged (with his right foot on the left thigh and left foot on the right thigh) on a huge bunch of *darbha* grass spread on the floor, holding hands together with right hand on the upper side. Before the actual recitation he has to do *ācamana* three times, two times touching (his lips), and touching (his) head, eyes, ears, nostrils, and recite the *mantra* ‘om’. Then he is to recite the three *vyāhṛti*-s (the *mantra*-s *bhūh*, *bhuvah* and *svah*) intermixed with the *gāyatrīmantra* with *savitṛ* as its *devatā*. The *gāyatrīmantra* should be uttered like this: first, each quarter separately, then each half separately, and then the whole as a single unit. Then he has to resume the veda-recitation from where he had stopped (the previous day). This recitation is to be followed by *paridhānīyā ṛk* (the *mantra* ‘om namō *brahmaṇe* etc.’). After returning home he is to give away something as *dakṣiṇā*.

### The origin of *brahmayajña*

In addition the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, in the beginning, as a prefatory passage, narrates the origin of *brahmayajña*. This is called an *upākhyāna* by Sāyaṇa. The story goes like this: ‘The Pṛśni<sup>29</sup>-s, a group of holy sages, who are said to have been created at the beginning of creation (*kalpādī*) were doing penance. Then the *Brahman*, the self-originated approached (manifested before) them. By its grace, the Pṛśni-s could see the

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<sup>29</sup> Sāyaṇa explains the term as ‘white, devoid of impurities by birth itself’ ते च पृश्नयः शुक्लाः स्वरूपेणैव निर्मलाः सन्तोऽपि पुनस्तप आचरन्।

*brahmayajña*. Then they performed it. The recitation of different branches of the Veda got transformed into different offerings like ghee, honey, milk and meat for gods. Gods were ridden of the sin of hunger and they attained heaven. The ṛṣi-s, i. e. the Ṛṣi-s got identified with the *Brahman*.<sup>30</sup>

### *Brahmayajña* the sin-expeller

The text states the eradication of all kinds of debts and sins and absolute freedom to traverse all the worlds as the prime and unfailing efficacy of performing *brahmayajña*. By citing an old couplet (ṛk<sup>31</sup>), it substantiates this. As if not satisfied with this it extols the efficacy of *svādhyāya* to remove all kinds of sins by narrating a story. ‘Agni’ was afflicted by sin, right at his birth. Then gods removed it by offerings (*āhuti*). The impurities of the offerings were removed by *dakṣiṇā*. *Dakṣiṇā* in turn was purified by Brahmins. Brahmins were purified by the *Veda*-s (*vedamantra*-s). The *vedamantra*-s were purified by ritualistic (daily) recitation – i.e. *svādhyāya*. Thus *svādhyāya*, i.e. *brahmayajña*, is a purifier par excellence which, caused purification of even fire the universal purifier<sup>32</sup>. Thus *svādhyāya* has got the efficacy to purify even gods.

Thus it can be seen that the origin of the concept of *brahmayajña* is an expiatory act to remove sins. This is corroborated by the fact that this whole section of *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* dealing with the *pañcamahāyajña*-s comes immediately after the enunciation of *kūśmāṇḍa mantra*-s as well as the narration of their power to remove severest of sins (यदर्वाचीनमेनो भ्रूणहत्यायास्तस्मान्मोक्षयध्व इति). Even the next section, immediately following the section on *pañcamahāyajña*, deals with expiatory rites. Similar is the case with the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* text. There the next section following the *svādhyāyaprasāmsābrāhmaṇa* deals with expiatory rites. It is named *Sarvaprāyaścittavidhāyakabrāhmaṇa*.

It seems that in course of time *brahmayajña*, the last entrant to the group of *pañcamahāyajña*-s got prominence. And the five were called great sacrifices. In the earlier sources of *brahmayajña* itself there were attempts to equate it with *yajña*-s. In order to extol its efficiency it was placed in a higher pedestal by saying that it can

<sup>30</sup> अजान् ह वै पृश्नीस्तपस्यमानान् ब्रह्म स्वयम्भ्वभ्यानर्षत् ऋषयोऽज्ञवन्तदृषीणामृषित्वम् तान्देवतामुपातिष्ठन्त यज्ञकामास्त एतं ब्रह्मयज्ञमपश्यन् तमाहरन् तेनायजन्त .. .. ताभिः क्षुधं पाप्मानमपाघ्नन्नपहतपाप्मानो देवाः स्वर्गं लोकमायन् ब्रह्मणः सायुज्यमृषयोऽगच्छन् (तै. आ. २.९)

<sup>31</sup> तदेषाभ्युक्ता। अनृणा अस्मिन्ननृणाः परस्मिंस्तृतीये लोके अनृणाः स्याम। ये देवयाना उत पितृयाणाः सर्वान्पथो अनृणा आक्षीयेम।।

<sup>32</sup> अग्निं वै जातं पाप्मा जग्राह तं देवा आहुतीभिः पाप्मानमपाघ्नन् आहुतीनां यज्ञेन यज्ञस्य दक्षिणाभिर् दक्षिणानां ब्राह्मणेन ब्राह्मणस्य छन्दोभिश्छन्दसां स्वाध्यायेन अपहतपाप्मा स्वाध्यायः देवपवित्रम्।

always be performed irrespective of the place etc. in contrast with the usual learning/chanting of Veda-s, which had some restrictions like *anadhyāyaniyama*. And all the five were called great sacrifices just to extol their efficacy<sup>33</sup>.

### Manu on the purpose of performing *pañcamahāyajña*-s

The efficiency of *brahmayajña* to eradicate sins was extended to others in the group as well. When Manu<sup>34</sup> says ‘A householder has five slaughter-houses (as it were, viz.) the hearth, the grinding-stone, the broom, the pestle and mortar, the water-vessel. By using which he is bound (with fetters of sin)’<sup>35</sup>, this efficacy can be seen praised. But when he specifies five household utilities as causes of sins, it seems, as though, some other streams of thought have made a distinct impact on this ancient concept. The streams may be those of the non-Vedic traditions of Buddhism and Jainism.

### How does the chanting of *Vedamantra*-s propitiate the *pitṛ*-s

All the earlier sources of *brahmayajña* invariably commend the capacity of *brahmayajña* in propitiating the *pitṛ*-s<sup>36</sup>. What would have been the reason behind such a thought. Who are the *pitṛ*-s? Are they the deceased forefathers or a separate class of beings like *kinnara*-s, *gandharva*-s, *rakṣases* etc? Vedic tradition gives room to think that they are both<sup>37</sup>. But what was the origin of the concept? In any case what was the origin

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<sup>33</sup> The *Āpastambadharmasūtra* hints at this by the *sūtra* तेषां महायज्ञा महासत्राणीति च संस्तुतिः (1.4.14). For more details see Haradatta’s commentary.

<sup>34</sup> पञ्च सूना गृहस्थस्य चुल्ली पेषण्युपस्करः।  
कण्डनी चोदकुम्भश्च बध्यते यास्तु वाहयन्॥  
तासां क्रमेण सर्वासां निष्कृत्यर्थं महर्षिभिः।  
पञ्च क्लृप्ता महायज्ञाः प्रत्यहं गृहमेधिनाम्॥  
अध्यापनं ब्रह्मयज्ञः पितृयज्ञस्तु तर्पणम्।  
होमो दैवो बलिभौतो नृयज्ञोऽतिथिपूजनम्॥  
पञ्चैतान् यो महायज्ञान्न हापयति शक्तितः।  
स गृहेऽपि वसन्नित्यं सूनादोषैर्न लिप्यते॥ (६.६८-७१)

<sup>35</sup> Translation George Buhler’s, *Sacred Books of East*, Vol. 25, p.87

<sup>36</sup> यदृचोऽधीते पयसः कूल्या अस्य पितृन् स्वधा अभिवहन्ति ( *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* ); घृतकुल्या मधुकुल्याः पितृन् स्वधा अभिवहन्ति। ( *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* ); यदृचोऽधीते पयसः कुल्या अस्य पितृन् स्वधा उपक्षरन्ति ... अमृतस्य कुल्याः। ( *Āśvalāyanagrhyasūtra* )

<sup>37</sup> *Manusmṛti* states that *Pitṛgāṇa*-s originated from sages.  
मनोहैरण्यगर्भस्य ये मरीच्यादयः सुताः। तेषामृषीणां सर्वेषां पुत्राः पितृगणाः स्मृताः॥ (३.१९४)

of this concept that recitation of Veda can please the *pitṛ*-s? In the practice of chanting *vedamantra*-s to please the *pitṛ*-s when the Brahmins officiating as *pitṛ*-s partake food in a *śrāddha*, which prevails even today, only *mantra*-s pertaining to *pitṛ*-s and the those describing stories and legends of killing *rakṣas*es are recited and not all the *Vedamantra*-s in general. If we turn to the concept and custom of performing *śrāddha* it is still more complicated<sup>38</sup>. This aspect, i. e. the origin of the concept that reciting Veda would propitiate the *pitṛ*-s, needs to be probed into.

Why outside the *grāma* ?, What is a *grāma* ?

The *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* and the *Āśvalāyanagṛhyasūtra* ordain that the *brahmayajña* should be performed outside the *grāma*, in a place where even the thatched roof of the *grāma* is not visible<sup>39</sup>. Later authors do not specify this. Some, as already pointed out, like Baudhāyana and Bharadvāja on the contrary state that it should be performed sitting besides the ritualistic fire. The text of *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, afterwards, while praising the efficacy of *brahmayajña*, states that it can be performed anywhere as it is beyond any restriction whatsoever. It is the performance that counts and the violation of rules can be overlooked.

Why is it ordained that *brahmayajña* should be performed outside the *grāma* ? Is it because the time of composition of the text was that of formation of *Āraṇyaka* –s? There is no any indication for affirmation or negation. The reason has to be searched for.

Now what is meant by *grāma*? The term appears in many Vedic passages of later origin. Usually it appears as the opposite of *araṇya* (the forest)<sup>40</sup>. Hence it can be taken for a village. But what were the social and cultural boundaries and dimensions of these? When we go through the later Vedic texts and the texts of *kalpasūtra* we confront many such intricate and interesting issues.

Āpastamba, in his *Dharmasūtra*, while describing the rules for *vedādhyayana*, ordains that it should not be done in a *grāma*, where there is a dead body ; where there is

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*Yājñavalkya* explicitly states that *Pitṛ*-s are a group or class of gods. He says वसुरुद्रादितिसुताः पितरः श्राद्धदेवताः । प्रीणयन्ति मनुष्याणां पितृञ्छाद्धेन तर्पिताः ।।

<sup>38</sup> There are many kind of *śrāddha*-s , as *aṣṭakāśrāddha*, *māsikaśrāddha*, *mahālayaśrāddha*, *sapiṇḍīkaraṇaśrāddha*, *darśaśrāddha*, and *nāndīśrāddha*, to cite a few. Nibandha texts speak of 64 kinds of *śrāddha*-s (*ṣaṇṇavatiśrāddha*-s) to be performed in a year.

<sup>39</sup> अष्टदिर्दर्श is the word employed for this.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. ग्राम्यं वा एतदन्नं यदध्यारण्यं मधु । ; उभयान् पशूनालभते । ग्राम्याँश्चारण्याँश्च ; ग्राम्यैरेव पशुभिरिमं लोकमवारुन्ध । आरण्यैरमुम् ।; आरण्यान् ग्राम्याश्च ये ।; ग्राम्याश्च मे पशव आरण्याश्च यज्ञेन कल्पन्ताम् ।



a *cāṇḍāla* ; in which outsiders like *ugra* and *niṣāda* have entered etc<sup>41</sup>. These stipulations remind one of the *agrahāra*-s of medieval India. But the text belongs to the age of *Kalpasūtra*-s and the *Brāhmaṇa*-s. What actually were the geographical, social and cultural boundaries of a *grāma* during those times? It needs to be looked into.

## Conclusion

The concept of *pañcamahāyajña*-s is closely associated and intertwined with that of *vaiśvadeva*. Both these are very old concepts. The *vaiśvadeva* rite comprised three components viz. propitiating gods (*devayajña*), propitiating all fellow beings (*bhūtayajña*), and feeding guests (*manuṣyayajña*). The rite of offering water / *piṇḍa* to propitiate the *pitṛ*-s was included as an extension of propitiating fellow beings. The concept and custom of propitiating the *pitṛ*-s underwent many transformations. The concept and custom of *śrāddha* is an allied issue which also is very old and underwent many transformations. These four rites, viz. *devayajña*, *bhūtayajña*, *manuṣyayajña* and *pitṛyajña* were brought under one head of *vaiśvadeva*. The common feature of these rites is that food, which is essential for all these were prepared in ritualistic fire. The *brahmayajña*, which has its roots in the concept of *ṛṇatraya*, as an act of repaying the *ṛṣi-ṛṇa* , is the last entrant to this group. Its origin seems to be based on expiatory speculations or speculations and customs based on the concept of sin and the ways and means to escape from their adversary results. Thus the concept of five sacrifices came into being. The *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* preserves some of the early ideas and customs of practicing *brahmayajña*. The *brahmayajña*, which is often called *svādhyāya*, is the ritualistic recitation of *vedamantra*-s. Right with the origin of the concept of this ritualistic recitation, the idea or the belief that the utterance of *vedamantra*-s would please the gods and the *pitṛ*-s had come into prevalence. The origin of such a belief is to be sought into. It is curious that the ritualistic recitation of *vedamantra*-s was not permitted inside the house or the civilized settlements. It was to be performed outside the *grāma*. This takes us to the question as to what was meant by *grāma* during the days of the formation of *Brāhmaṇa* texts and the *Kalpasūtra* works. A careful and serious look into the geographical, social, political and cultural boundaries and dimensions of *grāma* would definitely be worth-undertaking.

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<sup>41</sup> अन्तश्शवम् (१.३.४); अन्तश्चाण्डालम् (१.३.५); तदहरागतेषु च ग्रामं बाह्येषु (१.३.१८)

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